

AN
ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SUFFOLK DISTRICT MEDICAL SOCIETY,

At its First Anniversary Meeting,

BOSTON, APRIL 27, 1850.

BY JOHN JEFFRIES, M. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

Published by Request of the Society.

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ADDRESS.

Gentlemen of the Suffolk District Medical Society:

I CANNOT but regret, that from the number of strictly medical subjects, which are so readily and pressingly presented to my mind as legitimate topics for a discourse, I am not at liberty to select some *one*, as a subject for this evening. But I am aware that the occasion requires an address of a different character.

Although we have met for years, under the broad panoply of the parent society, of which we are a branch, and conjointly with our professional brethren from all parts of the Commonwealth, have engaged in the intellectual and social pleasures of the anniversary; and although nearly the same individuals here present have annually, and sometimes more frequently, met in that City association which is designed to establish and perpetuate a Medical Police, we are now met in a new relation; we are convened to recognize the formation of a new organization. On this our first appearance before the public, as a distinct Society, and honored, as we are, by so large and flattering a representation of the intelligence and influence of the community, I think I shall

meet the wishes of this audience more exactly, if I take for a subject that which should alike interest our profession, and the community in which we exercise our professional calling.

May I solicit your attention to some desultory remarks on the relative position of the medical profession with the public ?

To understand the present, we must recur to the past. We have no quadrant, by which to ascertain at a moment's view, what is the precise point which the profession occupies, as it passes along the sea of time. We must examine the chart by which it has sailed, and note the incidents which have occurred, to learn where we are, and how to shape our future course. When some of us, who are here present, entered upon the stage of active professional life, the practice of medicine was very different from what it now is. I do not mean the mode of practice—although that is greatly changed by progressive improvement—but the relation in which the physician stands, towards his patient and the public ; the estimation in which he is held by the one, and the influence which he exerts upon the other. At that period, although the reverential awe with which the physician was regarded in ancient times by the great mass of mankind, had been removed from the minds of men, especially of the well-informed class, there still remained a willing submission to the guidance and unlimited control of the physician. It was thought, even by the educat-

ed, that the subjects which engaged the attention and study of the physician, were, from their nature, such as to be comprehended by him alone, who gave to them his undivided attention: that to the physician only, Nature revealed her hidden secrets, and Art imparted some mysterious power. Hence, there was an unlimited confidence in seeking and in following medical advice. The high standing with the community, for moral character and intellectual acquirements, which those gentlemen held, who preceded the time of which I speak, and who were then the leading men in medicine—nearly all of whom passed, within a short period of time, in advanced age, from the stage of life; and the equally elevated moral position and still higher professional attainments of those who immediately succeeded them, and who still remain among us, the honored fathers of physic, served very much to continue that reverential regard paid by the public to the profession. Nor was this deferential respect conferred only upon those who might more justly claim it as their due; but it was extended to all who legitimately exercised the healing art. It was bestowed upon the office, as well as upon the men. Although not equally, all shared this confidence, and exercised a measure of this power. The prescription of the physician was not then scrutinized as now, nor his judgment often disallowed. A confiding trust, almost a blind credulity, possessed the public mind, in the skill and intelligence of physicians. The spirit of inquiry

then slumbered in the public mind, and the sources of distrust had not yet been opened.

But things could not long remain in this condition: the genius of the people was against it; the constitution of the country was against it; the existing facility for acquiring knowledge was against it; the growing affluence of an intelligent and industrious community was against it; and above all, elements were at work in the physical world which were calculated to undermine medical influence.

My professional brethren, where is now that blind, confiding trust? Has it not faded, as it ought, before the light of truth? Where is that reverential awe, where that deferential respect? Are they not "in the deep bosom of the ocean buried?" Where is now even a just estimation of intelligence, integrity, and truth? Is it not withholden? That it has been unjustly withdrawn, will, I think, appear, as we proceed to consider the causes which have produced this result. Let us notice some of these, before we denote more distinctly the present condition of the profession. What has wrought this change in the public mind?

Since the introduction of that great agent by which space has been almost annihilated, and time made to perform a triple task—an agent changing the whole face of the world, and altering the aspect of all the relations of civilized life—since, I say, the introduction of steam, for the thousand purposes in

which it has supplied the place of human labor, and especially, since its application to navigation and to rapid locomotion, the human mind, roused into unwonted action, has been driven as by a tempest from its usual course; and, as this wonder-working power exhibited its applicability to new and important objects, a feverish expectation was produced which reason could not bound.

Not content with the application of this agent to the mechanic arts, to navigation of the seas and to railroads, men seem to have expected that it would take the place of other powers, equally established with this by the laws of Nature. Even the law of gravitation was to be set aside by this new power. Not satisfied with the triumphant navigation of the seas, the air was to be traversed by aerial ships. Not content with the wonderful rapidity of thirty, forty, or even sixty miles an hour, upon the surface of the earth, men wished to “ride upon the whirlwind, and to direct the storm.”

To strain still more this unnatural tension of the intellect, and to pervert still more this untoward judgment, the physical world was ready with another development, hardly less wonderful and exciting. Men and things had been transported with unheard-of speed; now, words and thoughts, being incorporeal, were to be carried with an increased velocity. Material things might move by the comparatively tardy motion of steam, but the breathings of the mind, being spiritual, must have the speed of

the lightning's flash. Electro-magnetism, which had engaged the attention only of some philosophers, at the time when Oersted first described the nature, and the operation of the combination of its component parts, drew the observation of the scientific world, when it was practically applied in furnishing a time-keeper, more useful and correct than even the sun-dial. Its power was then estimated, and it was applied as a mechanical force. But it did not fix the attention of that great mass of semi-scientific men—who ask not, so much, “What is it?” as, “What can it do?” until the construction of the Electric Telegraph. The first flash over the wires, was as if an electric shock had passed through mankind. Men's minds, already strained, were over-excited by observing this new wonder; and now, not satisfied with the marvellous result of speaking, to be heard for hundreds of miles, and even from country to country, in a few seconds of time, the common people wished and expected that matter, as well as mind, should be conveyed over the electric wires: that something like electric steam was to carry material things in safety as quick as the passage of light.

Other scientific discoveries have served to increase and to continue this reign of the imagination over the judgment. The introduction of the Phototype, by Daguerre, attracted the attention, and excited the wonder of the world; and the later improvements in the application of this principle, by Talbot, rais-

ed still higher the fanciful expectations of men. It was well calculated to inflame the imagination of proud, aspiring man, to use the solar rays for his pencil, and to delineate external things, with unerring truth, by controlling the touch of light.

A flood of improvements, more or less engaging, have been poured upon the public eye or ear, by the modification, or adaptation of some one of these great principles to new objects. Almost every steamer, on its arrival at our ports, brings some new discovery in science or the arts ; and carries, at its departure, some new invention in machinery. In arms, gun-cotton is offered for gunpowder ; the deadly Paixhan gun takes the place of the ancient cannon ; the revolver is used for the single tube ; the rifle is safely discharged without flint or percussion cap, by the aid of detonating powder, hitherto supposed so dangerous.

But it is not my purpose to enumerate the thousand fruits of genius, which have been produced ; the mention of which, would occupy our allotted hour. Science has led Art to the connubial altar, and their progeny is legion. I have said enough to show that there were causes sufficient, not only to rouse, but also to excite and to distract the public mind. It has been diverted by all this, from a calm contemplation of truth. A feverish thirst has seized the public, and the intoxicating draughts which have been taken to quench it, have but inflamed the body. A desire for novelty has been extensively

diffused throughout the community. A wish for change—for something wonderful or startling—has occupied the public mind. Old foundations have been broken up, and new fabrics have been constructed, many of which have proved without a basis. Such has been the general influence upon the mass of men—not upon all of every class.

It has been our consolation in times past, as it is still our happiness, to know that the number is not small, of those steady, intelligent, and thinking men, who cannot be easily deceived by a new chimera. But still, it remains a fact, that credulity, and not scepticism, is the feature of the age. Men believe too much, rather than too little, on subjects upon which they have no perfect comprehension. We may easily see that this state of mind and feeling is calculated to act powerfully on the subject of medicine.

Medicine, although it contains no hidden mysteries, to be revealed only to a few, embraces an extensive field of knowledge—a field much too large to be cultivated by those occupied in other pursuits. Hence, it is impossible for those who have not engaged in it as an especial study, to have a just understanding of its theory or its practice. Something may be gathered by observers of the principles which govern medicine, and something may be learned by them of their practical application; but such men are not qualified by habit or education to know much, or to discern clearly, on this subject. The desire for novelty leads some to re-

gard the precepts and practice of medicine without favor, because they are old; and the love of the marvellous induces many to cherish visionary substitutes as excellent, because they are incomprehensible. With not a few, a theory—if the idle speculations of the day, or rather the vain abstractions of the enthusiast, can be dignified with such a term—cannot be too ridiculous, too much opposed to common sense, to be believed. Claim for some new doctrine but a slight deviation from the laws of nature, and it will not be sufficiently exciting to be received; but assert for it some supernatural agency, and its proselytes are numerous! Should you declare, that by some new process the eye could be made to see more minutely or extensively than is natural, it would hardly be enough to arrest the vulgar attention; but place the sense of sight in the occiput, and you may have a host of adherents. Say that the touch can be made to discriminate, not only the colors of a manufactured texture, and even to discern the colors of light in the prism, this would not satisfy the wonder-loving world; but declare that it feels that which is not touched at all, that it finds tubercles in the liver, and tumors in the abdomen, in patients that were far out of the reach of touch, and the marvel is enough to stamp the silly lie with the seal of truth! How can such credulous minds appreciate the unadorned and simple principles on which a rational medical practice is formed? Would that it could be said with truth,

that this ignorance was confined to the uneducated and the vulgar ! It is not so. All classes, except the sober-minded, reading class, furnish their quota of superstitious followers. The lower middle class of society abounds with them ; and the upper class in fortune and fashion, furnishes not a few, who are ready to countenance and foster these delusions. One, moving in this circle, has been heard to declare, in a public place, that a particular bonesetter was born with the knowledge which he assumed to possess ; and when reminded, that, by its nature, knowledge was that which must be acquired, to assert the more strenuously, that with him it was innate. And on this perversion, the highest surgical authority in our community was put down, and the most arrant quack exalted.

There is also a legal spirit, which blinds the judgment of some, even of the learned, and of those who are enlightened in other matters, which prevents them from rightly appreciating physicians, or the truths which they present. These receive or reject asserted facts, by the number and respectability of the witnesses who say they saw them, without regard to the utter incompetency of such, to judge correctly on the subject, even of what they think they saw. The oculist has been assailed with the declaration of the astonishing deed that he had done, in removing an eye from the orbit, washing and replacing it. And when the miracle was denied, he has been silenced by the conclusive testimony of three wit-

nesses, who said they saw it done! The able and learned lawyer has been known to express his belief in that which the physician knew to be impossible, because four upright, intelligent and faithful gentlemen, declared that they had witnessed it.

The evidence of one who fully comprehends a subject, should outweigh that of a hundred who cannot know, and whose senses, even, may be deceived. Cases might be cited where this blind spirit has reached within the courts of civil law; but unfortunately, they are too frequent to need to be presented.

Before we notice the influence of this state of public sentiment upon the profession, let us trace the progress of medicine, during these changes of the world, and note its present position. And it is an agreeable task to turn from the contemplation of that, which must grieve the philosopher and sadden the philanthropist, as much as it injures and discourages the honest physician, to follow the march of medicine through the fields of knowledge.

Let us revert to the period which preceded this excited state of the public mind, and trace the progress of medicine through the stormy seas of the last thirty or forty years. What has the great body of physicians been doing, while the world has been tossed with such convulsions? How have we of this city, of this community, been engaged during the spasmodic movements of society? Let us answer these inquiries.

At that distant time, the position of medicine among us was such as to adapt it peculiarly for progressive improvement. Before the old physicians of that day had left us, a medical school had been established in this city, connected with the highly-renowned University at Cambridge. After the death or resignation of those who were its first Professors, it fell into the hands of those who still instruct, or who, having but lately retired, still watch over its interests with a faithful solicitude. The influence of this school has been greatly felt in giving shape and character to the whole profession in this community; and this influence has been of the most salutary kind. It has been a fortunate circumstance that it remained so long under the direction of those early associated with its interests; and a still higher subject of gratulation, that those were the hands of honest and enlightened men. There were not, with these gentlemen collectively, any particular doctrines to advocate, or with any one of them, any particular views to advance. There was not, then, and there never has been since, any extraordinary theory to be established, nor any extraordinary practice to be recommended. The Professors learned, that they might instruct; they studied industriously, that they might teach correctly. I proclaim it, with a proud emphasis, that the Boston Medical School has been, for these last thirty years, remarkably free from theories that were untenable, or teachings that

were uncertain or unsound. I do not utter this under the pressure of the official toga, which I have never worn; but I record it as the tribute of a grateful pupil. I thank my instructors that I was not early indoctrinated in error, or enlisted to do battle for the theories of a party.

The condition of medicine, in the old world, was favorable to the truthful instructions of this school at that early period. The Brunonian system, which a Scotch reviewer said, "had killed its thousands," had yielded to the milder doctrines of Cullen. Two opposing modes of practice—the heroic treatment, in England, and the expectant, in France—engaged the attention of the medical world. This school was not so near as to be drawn into the vortex of the one, or wrecked upon the rocks of the other; nor yet so far removed as not to observe the workings of both. Perhaps from sympathy, and more frequent intercourse with the parent country, there was, then, a predominance given to the therapeutics of England, as there is now to the pathology of France. But still, pledged to no system, observant of all that took place, both at home and abroad, this school has exercised an extensive, as well as a healthy influence, on the profession in this community, and in this commonwealth. Its opinions and practice have been generally adopted. Medicine has thus become so identified with this school, that the history of the one is also true as applied to the other. I need not, therefore, follow its honorable

and distinguished course, but speak of the medical body, of which it has been, and still is, a prominent and important part. Let us, then, trace the steps of the profession, as they are made by the whole body, by associations of parts, or by individuals.

The physicians of this place, as a body, have been most happily, free from prejudice, free to observe, free to think, and free to act. There is no conspicuous error, no prominent false theory, no general injurious practice, that can be pointed at, as distinguishing medicine, in this community. This is an important fact, and one which should receive the attention, as it deserves the approbation, of the public. Had physicians here vacillated from theory to theory, or changed from practice to practice, laying aside one jaded hobby to ride another, they might justly have forfeited the regard of the public. But they have been remarkably steady and consistent in their course. That which was new in science or art, and obtained a footing here, has borne the test of time; while that which has been laid aside, elsewhere, as false, has never been adopted here. We have not, therefore, had the mortification of denying that, which we once asserted, nor of being compelled to adopt that, which we once condemned.

In illustration of this. The simple, and therefore captivating theory of Brown, which makes all diseases to consist in debility, and, consequently, to require stimulants alone for their removal, was never in favor here. This system had nearly gone out of

vogue, after having beguiled a large number of physicians in the old, and not a few in our own country, before most of us entered upon our professional studies. A few of us witnessed its expiring gasp. Broussaism, which made the digestive organs the origin of all disease, never prevailed here, as a general system—nor other phases of the Physiological doctrines, which were hypothetical. Nor has Solidism, even when modified by modern improvements, been the exclusive system of the day; although, in this last, a broader foundation was laid, in truth, and the superstructure, in some parts, would bear the test of observation.

As a body, the physicians of this city cannot be justly distinguished, at any period, as Humoral Pathologists, as Brunonians, as Broussaists, or as Solidists. These, as systems, have come, and, for the most part, gone; but they have each “left its trace behind.” No system, which could at any time receive the sanction of a considerable portion of the medical world, could be utterly devoid of truth. There must have been something worth retaining in each of these; and there have been hands among us to pluck the flowers, and reject the weeds. Of the humoral pathology, something has been retained even to the present day; and that it contains yet more that is true, animal chemistry and the microscope have recently shown, in exhibiting those actual changes in the blood in disease, which were before taken on presumption; and it may, if I mis-

take not, be also seen by the careful observer, in some of the practical effects of the hydropathy of this day. The long successful, and distinguished career of one,* whose setting sun those of my age may have witnessed; in whose tall form was held the nearest likeness to the doctrines of John Brown; would seem to show that, although all diseases are not those of debility, at least some of them can be made so by heroic treatment, and then removed by stimuli.

The equally long confidence of a discerning public, in the successful course of another,† as a surgeon and physician, to whom Broussais himself points, as the first to designate that great feature of his doctrines—the pathologic influence of the organs of assimilation—may be regarded as a proof that there is no small degree of truth in the doctrines which he taught. Perhaps there is yet more to be culled from these, before they are dismissed; and from their practical application, as adopted by such men as Hamilton and Abernethy, before they are discarded.

From all these, but mostly from the pathology of the solidists, physicians here have taken the materials for the theory and practice of medicine; not to construct a new, or peculiar creed, but to retain whatever of good has been apparent in all. In the

* Samuel Danforth, M.D.

† John Jeffries, M.D., the father of the writer of this Address.

adoption of doctrines, or practice, they have been neither rash nor diffident. They have not rushed to receive one new promulgation because it was plausible, nor refused assent to another because it was strange, if it would bear the test of experience. It may be truly said, that they have been eminently conservative.

Such was the condition of the profession here, when, some eighteen years since, France heralded the discovery of a new path, which should lead much higher up the hill of medical knowledge. Louis, that master of pathology, whose escutcheon is, "Truth is in Nature; not in my fallible understanding,"—that close observer of phenomena, that careful recorder of facts, that uncompromising adherent to truth—he it was, who brought the science of numbers to bear upon the art of medicine, and who, more than any other, has elevated that art into the regions of that science. If the method of Louis was only the numerical system, which some suppose, its introduction would have been of incalculable service to medicine. When it is shown that nature, whose laws are as inflexible as truth, has, in a vast number of cases, fixed a sign upon a disease, that sign is diagnostic; it is the multitude of times that she expresses it, which proves to us that it is her law. Numbers cannot prove false. But this is very far from all that that master spirit has done for us. He who thinks otherwise, has never entered with him into that vast field of knowledge which

he reaps. Louis has not only shown that we must prove facts to be such, by numbers, but he has also shown us how we are to investigate those facts. It is quite as much the manner in which he investigates, as the matter which he brings forth. He does not only place the harp before us, and tell us, "There is music there," but he teaches us how to tune and strike its thousand strings.

Now it is this method of investigation which has so greatly improved medicine among us. We do not err when we date the beginning of an important change in medicine to the teachings of Louis how to observe disease. Before this, what was called experience was the highest guide; but what is this but a false application of the numerical system, fallacious as the memory on which it relied, and limited as the record to which it trusted? But now, facts were to be observed, and hypotheses discarded. It was no longer, "What do we think?" but "What do we know?" The change wrought in the minds of men was remarkable. Theories were to be tried by the numerical test, and practice was to be brought to the same bar. Each and every medicine, hitherto supposed to be beneficial, was to be tested anew. Authority, with its lofty brow and stately carriage, ceased to command obedience. In fine, all that was called knowledge, in medicine, was to pass through the purifying process of numeration.

In connection with this subject of an improving change, I beg to call your attention to another inci-

dent, originating from one of our own number. In the year 1835, a dissertation was read, by a late President of the Massachusetts Medical Society,* before that body, on the subject of Self-Limited Diseases. I am sure that I am within the bounds of conceded fact, when I say it had a most powerful influence on the Fellows of the Society; nor do I think I should exceed those bounds, if I should say, that on no occasion of a public medical address in this city, was a greater good ever effected. Original in thought, simple and lucid in construction, enclosing an extensive field, it exhibited distinctly the important truth, that over some diseases medicines had no control; and that they had no power, with a large class, to arrest or cut off morbid action. It led to a careful examination of the efficacy of remedies hitherto relied upon, and to a distrust of whatever was hypothetical. It took from under them the foundations on which some physicians rested; and induced all to scrutinize more fully the ground on which they stood. It was happily conceived, ably executed, and produced at a most propitious time. It introduced the name of Louis, perhaps for the first time, to some, and directed the earnest regard of all towards the subjects and the manner of the investigations of that great man.

From that time, the march of medicine has been

* Jacob Bigelow, M.D., Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic in Harvard College.

onward and upwards. By some, indeed, it has been thought, that the system of Louis and his school has, by the destruction of efficient practice, tolled the knell of physic; that so much has been found in the administration of medicines that was injurious or superfluous, that it must fall in estimation as an art; so many of its hypotheses had been proved fallacious, that the whole science should be condemned. But this is far from truth or justice. It has been the refiner's process. The more of dross which has been removed, the purer has been the metal which was left. Medicine, as it got rid of the clogs of error, has mounted higher and higher in the regions of truth. Knowledge has been increased, and from the nature of the case, must go on increasing. The sources of knowledge are careful observation and recorded facts. These can neither err nor change; so that, as time advances, the amount and the variety of facts must be augmented, and the sum of knowledge greatly increased.

The influences which have thus borne upon the medical character, have effected a change, which, from its nature, was calculated to affect materially the opinions of the community, in relation to it.

Physicians, as truth required, have not hesitated to declare a theory to be unsound when they have found it so, however long it had been cherished; they have not hesitated to confess some diseases beyond their control, and others to allow of alleviation, only, as soon as they knew them to be such,

however opposed to what was thought experience; they have admitted the inefficacy of many remedies, and the injurious influence of others, as soon as they had proved them such, however contrary to pre-existing opinions. They have openly declared an error when they have detected it, and honestly abandoned what they have found pernicious. This frankness and honesty has exposed them to distrust, when it should have commended them to regard. A measure of confidence has, consequently, been withdrawn, by some in the community, on the ground that they have distrusted themselves. And even the whole science of medicine has been condemned, by partial minds, because some of its teachings have been shown to be untenable; and the art of healing has been partly abandoned, because some of its appliances have been acknowledged to be ineffectual. Thus physicians are unjustly fallen in public estimation.

Let us now briefly advert to some of the improvements in medicine, which have taken place during the last quarter of a century, in this community; and it will evidently appear that, so far from deserving this low position, the profession, as a body, has never stood on so lofty an eminence for knowledge and integrity as now—never was more deserving of confidence and respect.

But a few years since, the dissection of the human body was attended, not only with the difficulties which are necessarily associated with the operation,

but with no small degree of personal danger, and of much risk of standing and reputation in society, on detection. In the year 1830, it was legalized by the Legislature of the Commonwealth, on the application of the Massachusetts Medical Society. For the accomplishment of this, the Society has recorded its thanks to a distinguished member of the bar, since dead.* Those who knew of the steps taken in that matter, and who were most efficient in accomplishing that important object, can tell of the debt of gratitude which the profession, and, may it not be said, which the community, owes to one, who has for some years presided over the interests of a neighboring District Society.†

By this civil enactment, the way was opened for physicians to lay firmly and broadly that cornerstone in the temple of medical knowledge which anatomy has wrought. Anatomy! the basis of medicine, which reveals the formation of tissues, the construction of organs, and the relation of parts; which shows to the scientific surgeon what are the structures involved in injury or in disease, and to the operative surgeon what his scalpel may not touch, and where it may safely go in removing disease. Anatomy! which, alone, opens the door of physiology, teaching the functions of organs, the nature and use of parts, the power and influence

* John Brazier Davis, Esq.

† Dr. Abel L. Peirson, President Essex District Society.

of each and every structure. Anatomy! the groundwork of true pathology, which tests the doctrine of diseases, exhibits the location of abnormal structure, and proves the nature of morbid affections. Anatomy! which not only lays the foundation, but enters into every part of the superstructure of medical science. And the opportunity offered was gladly improved by physicians:—they have availed themselves of this, the most important means of knowledge in their profession.

Anatomy has been diligently, deeply and minutely studied, in this city. The result of this has been to give confidence to the surgeon, and stability to the medical practitioner. In the prosecution of this study no suggestion has been allowed to pass unheeded, and no real improvement has received a tardy sanction. And, in its furtherance, no new appliances have been omitted. The important aid of the microscope has been called into full play, to elucidate structure and re-formation. The cell formation has been, to some extent, tested in animal and in vegetable matter. Every tissue has been examined, every texture sought to be unravelled. Every solid, and each fluid, has revealed to the microscope what was hidden to the natural eye. Things, unknown before, have become diagnostic signs of specific disease. Thus anatomy has become minute, to a degree hitherto unknown, and perfect beyond former experience.

Nor is it only the demonstration of the parts

of the body which has been made. The institutes of anatomy have been studied and taught; the principles established by nature, in the formation of man, have been sought out and proclaimed; the body has been studied, not only constructively and physiologically, but also psychologically. Diseased tissues, disordered functions, and mental aberration, have been examined together. The connection between mind and matter has been pursued, until fact ceased at the verge of hypothesis.

But it is in pathological anatomy that the highest attainments have been made. It is here that anatomy has produced the most practical results, and has proved most beneficial to suffering humanity. In this subdivision of this all-important branch, we have reason to be proud. If we have not all been original investigators of the varieties of diseased textures, we have had the benefit of the observations and instructions of one* who, although junior in years, to many of us, has been, on this subject, our senior in knowledge. No city in the old world is more favored than this metropolis, in possessing a thorough, intelligent, and able teacher of pathological anatomy. And the light, which modesty might have hidden, has been brought out and made to shine abroad. Information on this subject has been generally disseminated; so that, at no former time, has so much been known

* John B. S. Jackson, M.D.

among us, on the subject of diseased texture, as at present.

In comparative anatomy, also, that much neglected branch, in former times—in which some of us have given the results of our unskilfulness, as our acknowledgment of its merit—much is now accomplished. By the establishment of a professorship in this branch, at our time-honored university, this study is now made permanent, and the opportunity for further investigations and teachings is freely offered. Comparative anatomy, which establishes general laws in animals, which proves special laws in man, now reflects its light upon the human body with a distinctness and clearness before unknown among us. Let the great sagacity and marked intelligence, which were so lately exhibited in our highest court of law, in that sad trial which has so much harrowed our sensibilities, attest to the community the importance of these researches, and the elevated position which they have attained.*

The manner in which the investigations and conclusions of Laennec, with regard to the diseases of the chest, were here received, affords another honorable testimony of the integrity and intelligence of the medical body. There was so much of slowness as to exhibit caution, and so much of promptness in adopting his new mode of examining thoracic

* See the evidence of Dr. Jeffries Wyman, Professor of Comparative Anatomy in Harvard University, given at the trial of Prof. John W. Webster.

complaints, as to show the clear-sightedness to appreciate, the justice to approve, and the propriety to adopt, both the discrimination of these diseases which he made, and the method for their detection which he taught.

Ever since the first introduction of the views of Laennec, the knowledge of the diseases of the chest has been constantly and steadily increasing. There are among us some, whose teachings and whose writings, on this subject, justly entitle them to be experts in auscultation; and there is a degree of accuracy throughout the profession, in detecting and in treating these complaints, which may well compare with that of practitioners in any other place.

In surgery, the improvements have been, perhaps, greater and more directly practical than in any other branch of the profession. Time would fail me even to recount the various points on which improvement has left the impress of her hand. Of whatever nature, and however numerous, these have been, if they have come commended to the judgment, and especially if they have borne the test of experiment, they have been readily adopted.

In all the subdivisions of this important branch, great advances have been made. In operative surgery, there is a skill and confidence, derived from a more accurate knowledge of anatomy, which has effected the result in capital operations, and increased the benefit in minor cases.

Plastic surgery is no longer a mere mechanical

attempt to remove deformity, but is now studied in its relation to physiology, and to a correct pathology.

Ophthalmic surgery has justly taken a high stand, for its successful results. The facilities afforded for the study of the diseases of the eye at the Infirmary, where larger numbers of cases are presented for treatment, has tended greatly to this result; and the separation of this, as a distinct branch of practice, has perhaps done no less to improve a knowledge of these complaints, and promote a skill in operations. Ophthalmic literature has also received its contribution of valuable material, from some of the oculists of this community.

Dental surgery, which has sprung into existence as a separate branch of practice, within a comparatively short period, has assumed a great importance in relieving suffering, and in promoting the comfort of almost every individual. This is no longer merely a mechanical art, beautifully executed in its manipulations, but it has become a science, founded and practised upon an accurate knowledge of the healthy functions, and the diseased action of the animal economy.

Tenotomy has presented another field, where surgery has reaped new laurels. It is not only in removing deformities, so generally and so safely, that this art has proved most highly beneficial, but also in elucidating the fact that structures of fatal consequences, to be exposed to atmospheric influence, may be safely reached by sub-cutaneous division.

Operative surgery has stood high in this city, for many years—perhaps nowhere more so—and medical surgery has of late been making rapid advances in improvement. The distinction of tumors, and the accuracy with which their character is detected, under a careful observation, aided by the microscope; the constitutional character of malignant diseases; the nice discrimination of affections of the different textures of the same part; the simplicity of dressings; the efficacy of cooling applications; the powerful influence of dietetic treatment; these are among the benefits of a rational medical surgery.

Scientific surgery was never more elevated than it is now. Its institutes are taught in our schools, and the whole science is studied and followed with a zeal, a fidelity, and an intelligence, which promise for it a yet more elevated position. From what we now possess in this branch, we may justly expect to stand, if not unrivalled, at least equal to any, in teaching the principles and the practice of surgery. We have among us scientific surgeons, who are well qualified for the performance of any and every operation which reason can require at the surgeon's hand. There have been lately performed, in this city, operations which have tried the confidence and skill, the self-possession and the knowledge of the operator. And they have been done in a manner to warrant distinguished success.

In medical practice, as distinct from surgery, there

has been a very great and constant improvement among us, for many years. The sources of knowledge have been multiplying for the medical practitioner, and he has gladly and faithfully availed himself of all the advantages which have offered. The result is seen in the careful attention to the investigation of diseases; in the more accurate diagnosis; in the prudent administration of medicines; in the more certain prognosis; and in the more successful termination of cases. The medical practitioner of this day is distinguished not only by his skill in thoracic complaints, but also by a more accurate knowledge of other classes of disease; among which, as most important, may be mentioned the diseases of the skin, and the diseases of the mind.

Individuals have given special attention to cutaneous disease, and thus, not only have themselves acquired greater accuracy in their discrimination, and adopted a more correct mode for their treatment, but, as is always the case, where a few investigate closely, many follow the pursuit, by drawing the attention of the profession to these diseases, and by furnishing facilities for their observation and treatment, they have been instrumental in diffusing a more general and more thorough knowledge of these affections.

Perhaps there are no points in the daily practice of an accomplished physician, in which he acquires the confidence of his patients, and their friends, so

readily, as by a prompt and precise discrimination, and by successful treatment of cutaneous and ophthalmic complaints; because no diseases so much arrest the attention of people, or are so open to their observation. Physicians have been aware of this, and have given to them a more careful investigation.

Time will not allow me to give more than this general notice of the progress of practical medicine, and to mark some of its very many and highly useful improvements.

The physician has been aided in all this by the assistance afforded by Chemistry—the sister science of Medicine. This science, which has done as much, or more, than any other for the furtherance of the arts, for manufactures, and for agriculture, has also given an efficient assistance to the practice of medicine. Among its important discoveries, that of the active principle of plants, and the extraction of portions possessing known properties, in a concentrated form, so much more convenient for administration, and capable of so much more exact estimate of their effect and influence, is one of great benefit to the relief and comfort of the patient, and to the precision and confidence of the physician. The bulky forms of nearly all the most useful articles have given way to the more elegant productions of modern chemistry. Thus we are indebted for that exceedingly useful class of medicines—the alkaloid preparations of the *Ranunculaceæ*.

To the chemist, also, the physician owes a debt of gratitude for another extensive class of remedies:—in the combination of iodine with so many valuable drugs, furnishing in the iodides, concentrated and efficient agents for daily practice. But it has, perhaps, done yet more in the analysis of the secretions and the elements of nutrition of the human body. Animal chemistry has done much, and is doing yet more, to reveal to us the elements of a morbid condition, and to teach us how to remove such abnormal states, by the proper application of counter agents. This study is receiving its just attention among us, and will, unquestionably, ere long, find its position, and no doubt a high one, in the scale of useful knowledge. Let us remember, with grateful pleasure, that one of our own number,* upon whom has been bestowed the highest honor which can be conferred from abroad, did, in a series of experiments upon the gastric juice, so long ago as in the year 1834, go far to show the chemical affinities of vital action; and, in his declarations then, and since, assert the principles of animal chemistry, which has been illustrated by Liebig and his followers. Let us also pay to the science of chemistry the tribute of our united respect, for the use of those astonishing agents, the introduction of which has been the crowning glory of the age. For, in whatever way it may be thought that the anæsthetic

* Charles T. Jackson, M.D.

agents were introduced, there can be no doubt that, from the laboratory of the scientific chemist, issued the suggestion, which, when ripened into practice, has proved a blessing second to none ever yet discovered, for the relief of suffering humanity.

There is a yet broader and deeper principle, to which medicine owes its elevation among us, more than to any or all of those to which reference has been made, and to which it must look for its greatest activity and strength.

I mean the principle of association:—which collects the scattered fragments of knowledge, and builds the temple of science; which gives force and energy to every undertaking in which man can engage; which ensures success in every thing possible of accomplishment.

In human labor, it has produced stupendous constructions. The pyramids of Egypt, the temples of Carnac and Luxor, with the rest of extensive Thebes, are the product of this principle, with the ancients; and it is hardly less in modern times, in circling the earth with iron bands. To the arts and sciences it has given a most efficient aid. No art has advanced without its fostering care, and none has languished under its direction. No science has grown, without its maturing influence; and none has dwindled, under its auspicious aid. In literature, it has been the one bright sun, which has given light and heat to all the varieties of intellectual effort. I need say little to recall to this

enlightened audience what associations have done in the department of letters.

From the first enlarged idea of literary societies, by Lord Bacon, and even from the rude and defective attempts at associations, in the time of Charlemagne, this principle has been at work, to enlarge, to cultivate, and to render useful the powers of the human mind. Societies, which will probably last while time endures, have been brought into existence. The best act of the careless Charles was the institution of the Royal Society of London. And the sagacious Richelieu knew well the power of association when he patronized and encouraged the first members of the French Academy. England, Scotland, France, Italy, and Germany, have, for more than a century and a half, had societies for the promotion of knowledge, which have survived the fall of political dynasties, sending forth lights to illuminate the world. We owe something, also, to lesser associations for what they have done for literature. Most of the great men of our mother country and our own, have been men of social and literary clubs, to which we are indebted for some of the rarest gems of poetry, and for some of those sparkling effusions of wit and humor which delight us in our merry mood.

I may not linger here to speak of such men as Goldsmith—who, though he did not shine at the club, was influenced by such a literary union—of Campbell, for whose intercourse with the literary

men of Edinburgh we are indebted for the “Pleasures of Hope”—of Beaumont and Fletcher, whose united hearts have favored us with the sweet thoughts of their united minds; nor of the host of constellations in the firmament of literature, placed there by the power of association. Nor have I time to notice the social and scientific meetings of physicians, which have done so much for the promotion of medical science. From such, in London, have emanated some of the most valuable discoveries in our art; and it may be, that to such an one we are indebted for some of the deep thoughts of the reflecting Hunter.

We have availed ourselves of the power of this principle for the furtherance of medicine, and of the collateral branches of science, in this city. Let us notice some of the institutions to which it has given rise among us.

“The Natural History Society,” now so prosperous, and so justly esteemed by the enlightened part of the community, besides its distinguished head, numbers among its most efficient members some who are conspicuous in the medical profession. Associated effort has accomplished much, in founding and building up, within a few years, this important society; which, from its intimate relation to human anatomy and physiology, has produced no small amount of information for the benefit of medicine.

Other associations, more strictly medical in their

character, have, for a long time, exercised a powerful influence in advancing the cause of medicine, and in promoting public welfare.

“The Massachusetts Medical Society,” binding in one the physicians of the Commonwealth; giving the same standard of education to the centre and to the extremities of its body; diffusing an uniformity of practice, and of views, throughout the State; everywhere, and always, most highly respected, and thus exercising an extensive influence upon the public; has been the one great means of sustaining, supporting, and establishing a high medical character, and of securing to the public, that which was designed by its charter, the protection, assistance and service of an intelligent and faithful medical body.

“The Massachusetts General Hospital” has been the most instrumental means in advancing practical medicine among us. This institution occupies a position, as conspicuous in the promotion of medical science as does its noble edifice among the architectural ornaments of the city. The importance, to the medical student, of an opportunity to witness daily and extensive practice, is readily acknowledged, and the value of clinical instruction can hardly be over-estimated. This hospital has offered such facilities in an eminently successful manner. It has had, since its foundation, a steady and an increasing influence upon medical character; benefiting, not only pupils, but those engaged in practice, who must always be regarded as students in medicine.

"The Tremont Medical School," of later origin, but of sufficient duration to present, from among its former pupils, those who are now prominent as practitioners, has been another nursery for medical education. The system of teaching adopted here is a vast improvement upon the former mode of study. The daily recitations of this school, and the clinical instructions of the hospital, may be justly regarded as the most effectual aids which medical education has enjoyed in this city.

"The Boston Society for Medical Improvement," including much of the activity and intelligence of the profession here; holding frequent and highly interesting meetings for the purpose of medical improvement; possessing one of the finest collections of specimens of morbid anatomy in the country, under the supervision of the able professor of morbid anatomy of Harvard University; has had a powerful influence in eliciting information and disseminating knowledge. The cabinet of this society offers one of the strongest objects of attraction to medical strangers. The objects and pursuits of the society were precisely those which were most required in our community; and, so far as it has extended, it has produced a most beneficial effect. That it has the highest respect and most cordial good wishes of the whole body of physicians, is manifest from the alacrity with which all the profession, even those not recognized as members, have furnished subjects for discussion, and specimens for the cabinet.

Another society, of more recent formation — that for “Medical Observation” — is nearly allied to this, in its objects, and very similar in its organization. This efficient association is in the hands of some of the junior members of the profession, who bring to it an ardor, activity and intelligence, which ensure its success. It is destined to exert no inconsiderable influence on the prosperity of the profession, and the advancement of medical science in our midst.

So, also, we may hope, will be the influence of the “Boylston Medical School,” under the direction of nearly the same individuals; yet in its infancy, but which supplies a deficiency which has, of late years, existed in medical education, by the delivery of a course of lectures on the diseases of the eye, and instructions in that much neglected, but most important branch of study, the affections of the ear.

Once more has this principle of association been brought into action by the formation of the “Suffolk District Medical Society,” whose commencement we are assembled to celebrate.

The parent society, although accomplishing so good a purpose in uniting the medical profession in the Commonwealth in one body, was not designed for, and could not accomplish, the purpose of an instructor, in the various branches of medical knowledge. Its members were too widely spread to avail themselves of frequent meetings, for medical improvement or social intercourse. Feeling its weakness in this respect, it now requires, by its new

code of by-laws, what it formerly permitted or advised: the formation of subordinate societies, in every part of the State, which should reach, in their action, every thing which has relation to medical character. It is in the efficiency of these her children that the parent society is to gather her strength, and by these, the arms of her body, that she is to accomplish her most extensive and useful work.

The other societies, of which mention has been made, although right in kind, are all limited in extent, not embracing the whole body of physicians, in this locality; besides, as they do not owe allegiance to the general society, they are not so well calculated, in their isolated operation, to influence so powerfully the general medical interest.

The reasons for establishing District Societies, throughout the Commonwealth, are somewhat important. With a greatly increased population, there has been at least a proportional increase in the number of physicians. This affords greater facilities for professional and friendly intercourse, as a larger number can now be convened in the country towns, within a limited distance, than heretofore. It is most desirable that such societies should be generally formed and efficiently maintained.

Another consideration is found in the fact, that the general society cannot, in some of its influences, reach the extremities so fully as the centre of the body. This evil is very much removed, by making

various centres, for separate minor associations. Where District Societies have been most active, the beneficial influence of the parent society has been the greatest. If they were more extensively established, its benefits would be more universally felt.

There are other objects to be obtained for the profession, besides that of a general union, which the parent society cannot bestow. In order to raise the standard of medical education; to elevate the medical character; to stimulate exertion; to disseminate information and to promote a concert of action; it is requisite that a society should exist, which shall hold frequent meetings for professional improvement and for social intercourse. An association for these purposes, efficient in its operations, is even more desirable in this city than in any other part of the State.

The number of physicians is now very large, in this metropolis, and it is important that they should have a good medical police. Nothing can be so conducive to the efficiency of the laws which govern this body, as the frequent intercourse of the subjects of those laws.

Again, there is among the junior members of the profession, an amount of intelligence and activity which should, by no means, be permitted to lie dormant. The facilities for a better primary education, and those various happy influences on the professional character which have been noticed, have been eminently conducive to this. There has

been nothing more remarkable, in the few monthly meetings of this society, than the talent and information evinced by the younger members. It is not only just and proper that an opportunity should be afforded them to present their claims for distinguished abilities, but also that the way should be open for them to contribute their proportion to the general fund of knowledge, and to receive the fruits of experience which it is the duty of the older to distribute.

The frequent interchange of friendly feelings is as essential to the comfort of the physician, as is the interchange of professional opinion for his improvement. In this way, this society is calculated to do much good. It cannot be but that some asperities will rise between those who are aspirants for the same objects; and where much is heard, and little seen, of rivals in the pursuit of affluence or fame, these asperities may ripen into animosities. But where frequent and free intercourse is enjoyed, especially under circumstances which bring out the kindly affections, the rough points are rubbed off, and a smooth and more polished surface appears beneath. Many a faction has been disarmed by intercourse with an opposing party; many an unkind feeling has been removed by a personal acquaintance. The union of the social recreations with the intellectual pleasures which we enjoy at our meetings, is well calculated to remove every trace of petty jealousies, should such exist among us. If discordant minds

meet in the same worthy pursuit, the result, like that from various winds over the æolian strings, will be harmonious.

Another beneficial influence of this society consists in its offering one unbroken front against the invasion of error. The open expression of an united opinion, against any of the fanciful theories and false practices of the day, must disarm them of much of their injurious influence. And the hearty and united approval, by a large number, of a commendable object, does much for its promotion. It is the aim of the members of this society to move conjointly against error, and to act unitedly for truth.

Again, it is desirable that there should be something before the public eye, which portrays the doings of so important a part of the community as the medical profession; some point at which they should occasionally meet for mutual observation. May it not well be in the operations and the public meetings of this society, whose transactions are published, and whose doors are annually open, as on this occasion, to the observation of an enlightened and a scrutinizing public. The more closely the attention of the community is turned toward the medical profession, the better for the interests of that body. It cannot be that a discerning people can see physicians diligently engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, and earnestly occupied in searching after truth, without bestowing upon them their re-

spectful regard. The late meeting of the National Association in this city, as it attracted the attention of intelligent observers, elicited their entire commendation. So, in kind, will be the effect of the observation of the public, of the intelligent movements of this society.

A large association will comprise those differing in natural capacity and in the character of their talents. All are not ready to speak fluently, even on subjects for which their knowledge is distinguished. The minds of some are prompt to act; of others, slow. Some may express themselves more easily; others think more deeply. It is the free intercourse of all these powers which contributes to the general good. While genius sheds a brilliant light, and contributes largely to disseminate knowledge, it may, in return, derive assistance from less gifted minds. A practical suggestion from the most humble may awaken a train of thought in the philosophical, which may benefit mankind.

So, also, may the suggestions of genius be worked into most important practical results, by less pretending minds. Franklin conjectured and proved the identity of lightning and electricity; but others, far less profound, have given to the discovery its practical utility.

Modesty, too, may suppress or diffidence conceal that which, under the patronage of Associated Fellows, may be produced for the great benefit of all.

In these, and in various other ways, the meetings

of this society are calculated to exert a beneficial influence. Let us then cherish its interests, so well designed to advance the cause of medicine.

From this auspicious commencement, may we not confidently hope that when its meetings shall be more frequent, and its facilities to carry out its important designs, more full, it may prove a valuable aid to those who are its members, and an important benefit to all who are interested in its results.

The course of physicians hitherto has been highly meritorious. As a body, they have steadily followed truth in the pursuit of knowledge. Here and there, indeed, one has been found, allured by fancy, into the adoption of some of the ephemeral delusions of the day, or drawn, by the hope of gain, from the beaten path of science into devious ways. With such we hold no fellowship but in name. Chance has placed them with our number; but truth expels them from our fraternity.

With these small exceptions, physicians have been true to themselves and the science which they follow.

Is it not creditable to them, especially to the younger portion, that they should so perseveringly adhere to right principles and practice, when the views and feelings of those on whom they depend for a subsistence, have urged them to adopt the fashionable chimeras of the day? Should it not have convinced the public that those systems were

false, when they saw them rejected by the whole body of honest and intelligent men, however lucrative might have been their adoption? The public saw the readiness with which the body of physicians adopted the use of the anæsthetic agents into general practice. The effects of these are surely as wonderful as the pretended influence of the most vaunted system. There would have been the same alacrity to receive and to adopt other novelties, which have captivated so many in the community, had they borne the test of experience. But knowing them to be false, physicians could not, and would not, give them their sanction. They will not give them a character by their adoption, nor are they willing to prolong their limited existence by an undignified opposition. These follies “come like shadows;” so let them “depart.” In their transit, we have an opportunity of learning, from one, how firmly we may lean on Nature’s staff, in our daily walk; and from another, that one of the most common elements of nature may be sometimes applied as a remedial agent. From all of the delusions, as they from time to time appear, we may perhaps gather something to improve our art. If of no other practical advantage, they may show us the importance of associated effort to render the delusive theories of misguided minds as fleeting as they are false.

Had time permitted, I should have wished to have led you to the green graves of three of our

distinguished associates, each called suddenly, since the brief existence of this society, from active duties to the silent tomb. I should have loved to trace the course of one,* so like those heavenly bodies which, by their eccentricity and velocity, alarm the ignorant, but which delight the intelligent beholder, as he sees them flying on their course, but guided by the unerring hand of benevolence. Or, of another,† who, by the steady light which he shed on the scientific world, resembled more a star fixed in the firmament of knowledge. Or, of a third,‡ like a planet in its course, moving calmly, steadily and unobtrusively, in his orbit round the sun of truth. But we may not stop for this. The pen of friendship has delineated the character of two of these; and the many worthy public and private actions of the other are repeated from lip to lip by the community from which he has been violently removed. We must leave it for him, who will shortly address the parent society, to recount the virtues of the lamented dead.

On the lengthened consideration of the duties attached to our responsible calling we may not enter. They form that code of medical ethics which it becomes each one of us to study and to practice. Let us endeavor to perform these duties with all the faithfulness that we are able. Let

* George Parkman, M.D.

† Martin Gay, M.D.

‡ John D. Fisher, M.D.

us be true to *ourselves*; by improving such abilities as Providence has given each of us, and in sustaining a personal character above reproach. Let us be faithful to *each other*; by justly estimating and by fully according to others, their just meed of commendation; by a harmonious and friendly intercourse; and by an united effort to promote the best interests of the profession. Let us be true to *the public*; in shielding them from evils to which they are collectively exposed; and in zealously uniting with them in every moral reform and every intellectual advancement. Let us be faithful to those who are *our patients*; carrying into the chamber of sickness the highest amount of knowledge that we can acquire, with a most solicitous desire to apply it for practical relief. Forgetting ourselves, in our desire to do good, let us build our reputation on our success, and not on the opinion of our skill, which we have aimed to establish. While the kindest feelings of our nature flow out in unfailing sympathy towards the sick, let us be their honest counsellors and tender comforters in every trying hour. Let us be faithful to the SUPREME BEING, whose servants we are, and to whom we must render an account, for the spirit in which we have performed our professional duties: remembering that the christian cannot be rid of his religious responsibilities in any of the duties of life; that they follow the legislator to the halls of the assembly; the scholar to his study; the merchant to his counting-house; the

mechanic to his form ; and the laborer to the field ; and that they press upon the christian physician with peculiar force at the bed-side of the sick. Let us not fail to cherish, and to express a deep dependence, upon divine aid, in the execution of our daily task. Let us do our utmost to remove that stigma which has been unjustly affixed to the profession, that it leads to 'scepticism and infidelity, by pointing to the long catalogue of such names, as Harvey and Sydenham, Hartley and Gregory, Falconer and Arbuthnot, Hoffman, Good and Enoch Hale ; and, especially, by exhibiting in our own case that it is untrue.

There is a danger that those engaged in investigating material things, should forget the Hand which brought them into existence ; that, while science is pushing its inquiries into the cause and manner of re-production, and looking through matter for its vital principle, it will forget Him who breathes into it "the breath of life." Let us flee this danger, by a cherished regard for a divine revelation. Let us labor in our profession with zeal and earnestness, as if success depended only on ourselves ; and let us seek the counsel of the Great Physician, as if the blessing was alone from Him, without whose aid,

"Bethesda's bath could never heal,
Nor Siloam's pool restore."

ERRATUM.—On page 21, Note, for “ Professor of the Theory and Practice of
Physic,” read Professor of Materia Medica and Clinical Medicine.



